

THE HUMANESOCIETY

OF THE UNITED STATES

CLOSE-UP REPORT

HSUS Helps Bust Cruel Dogfights

Thirty-Eight Arrested in Raids in Georgia and Ohio

For the 100 or so men, women, and children who gathered in an unused barn near Augusta, Georgia, it was going to be just another Saturday night's entertainment. They'd planned to have a good time; eating, drinking, and betting on and watching dogfights—brutal battles between dogs which had been painstakingly bred and trained to try to kill one another.

The crowd cheered wildly as two American Pit Bull Terriers savagely tore at each other. The last thing they expected was a raid. But near 1:00 a.m., Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) agents, assisted by HSUS Director of Field Service and Investigations Frantz Dantzler, surrounded the barn, and put an end to the cruel Saturday night "fun." The raid was made possible by a tip Dantzler provided seven months earlier.

When it was all over, 18 people had been arrested, not only for dogfighting, but also on a variety of other charges, ranging from selling unlicensed beer to cocaine possession. Several were charged with cruelty to animals, which is a misdemeanor in Georgia, despite the fact that it is probably the most brutal of the so-called blood sports.

The Georgia raid was only one of several recent successes in the fight to put an end to dogfighting. Last spring, Dantzler testified before a state legislative committee in Ohio that was considering a bill to upgrade dogfighting from a misdemeanor to a felony. According to Dantzler, the bill which passed and became law in June



This actual combat photo, taken by an undercover investigator, shows how these dogs become literally the center of attention during the fights. But the most painful battles for the animals occur after they leave the pit. Whether they win or lose, it's not uncommon for pit bulls to die hours or days after their events from the severe injuries they inflict on each other. One of the 10 animals confiscated in Georgia died shortly after the raid. On the advice of a veterinarian, four others had to be euthanized later.

of 1980 is one of the nation's best.

It didn't take long to demonstrate the new law's effectiveness. An investigation planned jointly by The HSUS Great Lakes Regional Office and several local animal welfare and law enforcement agencies enabled an undercover investigator to penetrate that state's underground dogfighting fraternity.

Testimony provided by the investigator last fall resulted in the handing down of forty indictments against twenty people in five counties and the confiscation of 39 dogs. By spring, 1981, the seventeen trials conducted under the new law had produced seventeen convictions, and the best documented cases had not even come to trial yet!

Portrait of A Dogfight

A typical dogfight "convention" (a schedule of several matches) takes weeks or months of planning by promoters and participants and often involves dogs from several states or even other countries. The primary way dogfighters communicate with each other is through the several magazines and newsletters which contain articles of interest to dogfighters and advertisements for dogfighting paraphernalia, dogs available for sale or at stud, as well as dogs who are "open to match." Dogs are matched by weight and sex, and contracts are drawn up and signed. Most matches are arranged by telephone.

Conventions are typically held on weekends, often in remote locales. Security is tight, and spectators must go through several security checks before they are led to the site, which may not be decided on until shortly before the convention is scheduled to begin.

Dogfighting is an expensive pastime, both for spectators and participants. The average admission fee is \$35, which usually buys a no-frills seat on a bleacher. Betting is vigorous, and the stakes are often very high. At the Georgia raid, authorities confiscated more than \$40,000, and that was only from the eighteen people arrested!

Owners and trainers have large investments, also. Pups frequently cost \$300 to \$500, and stud fees for champions or grand champions (dogs who have won and survived several fights) can top \$1,000. In addition to the elaborate training equipment like treadmills and heavy metal collars, contract fees for a fight can run from \$250 up to \$1,500.

A match begins when the dogs are placed in their corners of the "pit," the dogfighter's version of the gladiators' coliseum (usually a twenty-foot square plywood ring, with a carpeted floor and two-and-a-half foot high sides). After several fights, the floor and sides of the pit are red with blood.

When the handlers and referee are ready, the dogs are faced toward each other and the signal is given for them to be released.

Most of the noise during a match comes not from the dogs, but from the spectators, shouting bets and encouragement. The dogs are far too busy with their mouths to bark. American Pit Bull Terriers have extremely powerful jaws. They fight by making a "hold" on the other dog with their front teeth, and chewing with their rear teeth. As the dogs rip and tear at each other, blood, urine, and saliva spatter the sides of the pit and the clothes of the handlers. Frequently the only sounds from the ring are those of crunching bones and cartilage.

If at any time a dog fails to maintain complete attention on the destruction of its opponent, even if it's only a shake of the head, a "turn" is called and the dogs are parted with a

stick and returned to their corners so the blood can be sponged away. The dog on whom the turn was called must then attack the other dog (called "scratching") for the fight to resume. This continues until one of the dogs loses because it cannot or will not scratch to its opponent. Frequently a pit bull, carefully bred for aggressiveness, will continue to try to fight until it passes out or dies. Even dogs who win fights often die days or weeks later from their injuries. Dantzler estimates that few dogs ever engage in more than three fights during their "careers." Many die after a single encounter.

What Are The Laws? How Do They Work?

Despite the fact that dogfighting is illegal in all fifty states and under federal law, most dogfighters don't get

Shown here is some of the paraphernalia often found at dogfights. At right, a law enforcement official holds two "parting sticks," used to separate dogs between "turns" and also to pull the dog's skin free from his tooth if he becomes "fanged." Below, a Georgia Bureau of Investigation official catalogs drugs and weapons confiscated from those arrested at the raid. It is ironic that the most severe penalties doled out to those arrested at dogfights have been on gambling, drug, and weapons charges—not for cruelty to animals.



Photos—HSUS/Dantzler



Before a fight takes place, the handlers exchange dogs so they can be examined and washed (right) to make sure there is no foreign substance on the dog's coat which could poison or paralyze its opponent. After the fight, however, the dogs are often shoved back into their carriers or into the back of a pick-up truck (above) to await the trip home. This dog, confiscated in the Georgia raid, died before veterinary care could be obtained.



What Is A Dogfight?

Dogfights are sadistic contests that fans vehemently defend as sport. Because dogfighting is illegal, dogfighters are understandably secretive about their activities. In fact, they are so successful at being secretive that most Americans don't even know the activity exists. "Too many of those who do know about it," Dantzler says, "are under the impression that it's an activity that's dying out." Nothing could be further from the truth. Dantzler says that not only is dogfighting growing in popularity here in the U.S., but also in Japan, Germany, Canada, England, and parts of South America.

In the U.S., dogfights are most prevalent in the Southeast, Southwest, Great Lakes region, and California. However, HSUS investigators have information documenting dogfights in practically every state in the U.S.

caught, and those that do get off easily.

After the Georgia raid, all animal cruelty charges against those arrested were dropped, despite the overwhelming evidence found at the premises, including the mangled dogs themselves. Penalties are too lenient to act as an effective deterrent in Georgia.

The laws governing dogfighting vary widely from state to state, and enforcement varies even more widely. The Federal Animal Welfare Act was amended in 1976 to specifically outlaw dogfighting, including making it illegal to use the U.S. Postal Service to promote animal fighting ventures, but federal enforcement of the provisions has been virtually nonexistent. Last year, The HSUS sued the government to force it to enforce the law. A pre-trial ruling in the government's favor is being appealed.

The key to ending dogfighting, according to Dantzler, is not only passing good laws, but seeing to it they are effectively enforced. "The best law is no good without good enforcement," he said. "Dogfighting is a big business in this country. It's going on all the time, and encouraged by lax law enforcement, it's spreading."

What HSUS Is Doing

The HSUS believes that dogfighting, along with other blood sports, is nothing less than torture for fun that is degrading and unfit for a civilized society.

The HSUS' dogfighting program is one of the most extensive in the nation. We are frequently contacted by other animal welfare groups, law enforcement agencies, and the media to provide assistance or expertise. Our investigators frequently travel undercover to dogfights, risking their lives to garner information from the heavily armed and often drug-using dog-

fighting fraternity. It is often information that only we are interested in providing that enables dogfighters to be caught and arrested.

It is clear that our work is paying off. In the last year alone, we have assisted in putting together successful raids in at least five states, resulting in more than 100 arrests and eighteen convictions, including the first conviction under the federal Animal Welfare Act. Many others arrested at the dogfights have yet to come to trial.

As part of our efforts to end dogfighting, The HSUS is also:

- Conducting law enforcement seminars for local animal welfare agencies, animal control departments, and police departments, explaining how to conduct investigations and successful raids;

- Working with law enforcement agencies developing information on specific fights;

- Testifying before state legislatures trying to upgrade laws; and

- Working to expose this abomination to the American public through the media and mailings like this one. Last year when the *Lou Grant Show* did an episode on dogfighting, with technical assistance provided by an HSUS investigator, millions of viewers were made aware of this barbaric activity.



HSUS/Dantzler



This individual was ordered to hold this dog in the corner of the pit until law enforcement officials could establish order during the Georgia raid. The animal was later euthanized.

"The fact is, dogfighting is a big business in this country. It's going on all the time; and, encouraged by lax law enforcement, it's spreading."

What You Can Do To Help...

Because The HSUS is one of the few national organizations investing significant amounts of time and money to combat dogfighting, we desperately need the help of our members and others concerned with the welfare of animals. It is likely that dogfights occur in your state or even your community. Here are a few suggestions for how you can help us end this cruel enterprise:

- **Find out what the laws pertaining to dogfighting are in your area.** If you hear of a dogfighting arrest near you, write to your state's Attorney General to urge stiff penalties for those convicted of participating in this outrageous activity.

- **If you hear of a dogfight planned for your area or one that's already happened, let us know.** Remember

that weapons, drugs, and violence go hand in hand with dogfighting, so it's better to leave investigations and raids to trained professionals.

- **Help spread the word about cruel dogfighting.** Use the information in this report to write letters to local officials and law enforcement agencies. Start your own dogfighting awareness campaign.

- **Finally, support HSUS's efforts to end dogfighting by sending a tax-deductible contribution today. Your help is critical if we are to continue our exhaustive and often expensive investigations into this barbaric activity. Please use the enclosed postage-paid envelope to send your gift to help The HSUS help the animals!**



2100 L Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20037
(202) 452-1100

● 1981, The Humane Society of the United States

Additional copies of this report are available upon request at 25¢ each. 6/81